

Gibbons (H.)

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE

TO THE

SUMMER COURSE OF 1849,

IN THE

PHILADELPHIA COLLEGE OF MEDICINE,

BY

HENRY GIBBONS, M. D.

PROFESSOR OF INSTITUTES AND MEDICAL JURISPRUDENCE.

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PHILADELPHIA COLLEGE OF MEDICINE, April 9, 1849.

PROF. HENRY GIBBONS, M. D.

DEAR SIR:—At a meeting of the Students of the Philadelphia College of Medicine, held in the Hall of the Institution, Mr. J. Francis Cunningham, of Pennsylvania, was called to the Chair, and Mr. J. H. Alday, of the West Indies, appointed Secretary. On motion, it was unanimously resolved to request a copy of your Introductory Lecture for publication, and the undersigned were appointed a Committee to carry the resolution into effect.

Very respectfully yours,

T. G. WORMLEY, Pa.

JAS. WATT, Pa.

ANDREW M. BURDEN, Philada.

JOHN W. EARLS, N. C.

JOHN H. ALDAY, West Indies.

J. B. S. HOLMES, Ga.

H. F. GIBSON, S. C.

J. H. BRYANT, Louisiana.

CHAS. MURPHY, S. C.

J. S. HOUGHTON, Boston.

G. W. MANSON, Philada.

J. W. STAGGERS, S. C.,

GENTLEMEN:—In compliance with your request, I place in your hands a copy of the Lecture referred to.

Cordially yours,

H. GIBBONS.

Philadelphia, 4th mo. 12, 1849.

LECTURE.

GENTLEMEN,—

The Faculty of the Philadelphia College of Medicine having agreed to open the present Spring Course without the usual form of an Introductory Lecture from each chair, have appointed me to give a general Introductory on the present occasion. For myself and my colleagues, permit me to bestow on you a hearty greeting, and to introduce you not only to the halls of our institution, and to the professional relations of teacher and pupil, but to the exercise of social intercourse with your preceptors, and the enjoyment of fraternal regard and sympathy.

You have entered upon the study of medicine at an important period. The age in which we live is marked by reform and revolution, compared with which, the history of man, eventful as it is, affords no parallel. The human mind marches onward to its destiny, with a progress unknown to preceding generations. It has accomplished more in the last twenty years, than in any century since God breathed his own life into the image of clay. Steam and electricity are remodeling the physical world. Philosophy and Science are brought down from heaven to dwell with man, as every day familiars and ministers. In the noblest sense of the expression, the age is utilitarian. The theoretical and metaphysical give way to the practical and useful. Things gain pre-eminence over words. The human character is developed, and the individual man stands forth in fulness of stature. The spirit of progress sweeps over the earth like a hurricane, leveling the flimsy

steeple reared by speculative fancy, and stirring up the dead sea of antiquity to its deepest bed, and shaking to their very foundations the everlasting pillars of truth.

The science of Medicine does not slumber amid the general commotion. Catching the spirit of the age, it marches onward with unexampled progress. Never before was its advance so rapid. Thousands of god-like intellects explore its mysteries, and their rich treasures of knowledge are showered down on the earth like rain. Talent and genius and industry and ardor—all the elements of intellectual power—all the instruments of triumphant success, are concentrated on the labor of developing the resources of the healing art.

Under these circumstances, gentlemen, have your studies commenced. You have chosen the cradle of medical science in the Western Hemisphere. Here, in this city, Hygeia reared her first temple in the new world. Here Wistar, Barton, Physick lived and taught; and here Rush gathered the Amarynthine wreath.

As a theater of medical instruction, Philadelphia stands as she has ever stood, without a rival this side the ocean. In the rapid advancement of medical science, she continues to lead the way. The multiplication of her schools has tended greatly to sustain her reputation, by kindling the spirit of rivalry, and extending the means of education. Twenty-five years ago, the venerable and honored University stood alone. Since then, three other schools have sprung up, one after the other, and what is the result? Who will deny that the course of instruction has been improved—*greatly* improved? And so it must be. In this city, and in this age, names and pretensions cannot build up a medical school. There must be something substantial—some real merit. Only the deserving shall command success. With these considerations in full view, the Philadelphia College of Medicine pursues its course. Our institution aims not to build itself up on the ruins of others. Whilst a generous rivalry is honorable and useful, the vulgar and reckless competition of trade should be avoided and spurned. The teachers of the medical schools of Philadelphia hold a

position too lofty to be reached by the shafts of envy. They present an array of talent, of learning, and of well-earned fame, which qualifies them for comparison with the teachers of any other country. Far be it from my purpose to attempt to tarnish their renown. Let me rather bear witness to their excellencies, and emulate their example, that I may share their reputation.

In former times the character of the medical profession depended greatly on factitious and extrinsic considerations. An ignorant people were easily duped by superstitious pretensions and mysterious concealment. But those ages have passed away, never to return. The general diffusion of knowledge has subverted the aristocracy of ancient literature. The dogmas of the hoary Stagyræ have dissolved into air. The dust of antiquity is swept into the street, and school-boys irreverently pluck the grey locks of Time. Old things are suspected because they are old. The authority of great names is destroyed. The days of mystery and fable have gone by. No longer can we command the veneration of the multitude by pointing to Apollo and the Centaurs as our professional ancestry. The unfettered mind of this democratic age has no respect for anything but truth, and none too much for that.

At the present moment, our profession is passing through a fiery ordeal. The spirit of innovation, the love of novelty, the prejudice against ancient or existing institutions, afford an excellent opportunity for ingenious system-builders to play on the public mind, and to blow up their speculative bubbles to an attractive magnitude. A thousand causes are conspiring to diminish the confidence of the people in the efficacy of medicine, and the skill of the regular practitioner. Whilst quackery and charlatanism in their grossest forms attract the low and vulgar, minds of a higher grade are fascinated with fanciful hypotheses; and powerful appeals are made to the common understanding by an imposing array of reputed facts. The errors and inconsistencies of physicians, and the imperfections of our art, are blazoned forth with amazing industry.

Under these circumstances, gentlemen, if you would succeed

in your calling, and maintain the dignity and influence of your profession, it is necessary to engage in your studies with an earnest and a resolute spirit. Much of the success of your career will depend on the impulse of the first step;—the present moment may shape your destiny. There is much truth in the saying—"what a man wills, he does." If you aim at little, you will be likely to accomplish nothing. If you aspire at much, you will attain more. Resolve to do something for the profession and for the world. Hold up before you, as models, the masters in science. Pursue your purpose with zeal and energy and industry. You will not be disappointed.

To *educate* means to bring out—to develop. It is the province of education to elicit, cultivate and strengthen the faculties of the mind. With many the idea prevails that to educate means *to pour in*. Hence the great endeavor of many teachers to cram their pupils; and the common error that he is best educated who knows the most.

But education cannot be performed without throwing something in, as a basis. Interest cannot accumulate without a capital. If you multiply nothing by hundreds or millions, it is still nothing. Properly to develop the intellectual character requires knowledge first, and then reflection. Knowledge is the raw material—reflection moulds it, and applies it to human purposes.

The mind is like the stomach—first comes the susception of aliment, then the digestion. A man who should spend all his time in eating would soon discover his mistake. After eating in moderation, it is proper to allow the stomach an opportunity to digest the food. What the digestive process is to the body, thought is to the mind. It dissolves and assimilates, and in this way prepares the food for nourishment.

The effect of over-eating is to produce indigestion. If the stomach be crammed beyond the convenience of the digestive process, its function is impaired, and a train of morbid symptoms result. Precisely so with the mind. If it be stuffed with naked facts, or unarranged and unassimilated knowledge—if it be filled with truths, in themselves important and invaluable,

but poured in faster than they can be disposed of by the power of thought, mental dyspepsia is the result. There is such a thing as a learned fool, and it is manufactured precisely in this way.

You will find no difficulty, gentlemen, in applying these general principles to your course of medical education. It is not enough that you should store up knowledge. You should accustom yourselves to systematize and apply it. An education which consists merely in gathering knowledge, is dull and dry. It is of little use to the possessor or to any one else. There is little or no enjoyment in the cumulative pursuit of knowledge. Let me make another comparison between the body and the mind. See the pleasure which the animal world derive from motion—from exercise. The bird, the kitten, the dog, the horse, all delight in bodily recreation. See the school boy, let loose from his desk, how he romps and shouts. Providence has so made us, that the means necessary for the full development of our bodily and mental energies shall be a source of pleasure. Remember, therefore, while you are storing your minds with useful learning, that to exercise your reflective faculties, and to make use of what you learn, is a duty replete with enjoyment.

It was the advice of Dr. Rush to his students—"Observe, read, and think—read, think, and observe for yourselves." There is more to be done than to learn merely—to read and to hear—to gather instruction from the labor and demonstration of the teacher. You must observe for yourselves. You must keep your eyes open to the world around you, and catch the truth from every passing vision. And every thing that you observe, or that you collect from books and men, you should make the object of thought. Remember that no truth stands alone. Every fact in the physical world is both an effect and a cause. It is but a link in a lengthened chain, the final link of which is attached to the throne of God.

The habit of reflection to which I commend you, will give zest to your studies, and relieve the toil and drudgery of education. Your knowledge, like the types of the printer, in-

stead of being thrown into a confused and chaotic pile, will assume a methodical arrangement, more or less perfect. There is a vast difference between him who can apply his knowledge and him who cannot. An incalculable store of knowledge is lost to the world for want of attention to this subject. While a mere collector of facts locks up every thing in the strong box of memory, the systematic and thinking enquirer is always scattering around him the flowers of science. The particles of knowledge that enter his mind are no sooner brought under the influence of his reflecting powers, than they assume, with a rapidity comparable to the process of crystallization, definite and beautiful forms. *Thought crystallizes knowledge.*

I cannot dwell with too much emphasis on this interesting subject. A habit of mental inertia or slothfulness, often paralyzes the most lofty talent. To many persons it gives pain to think—the process of reasoning is onerous. Be ever mindful to guard against this habit. It will lead you through the world with your eyes shut ; or if haply your bodily vision be employed, it is the more to your discredit to see without perceiving and reflecting. Unless the mind considers what the eye beholds, then is mind a useless endowment. Unless reason contemplates the objects of vision, reason is bestowed in vain, and man sinks to the level of the brute. Had the fall of the apple produced no impression but on the eyes of Newton, the glorious discovery of gravitation had not been his. How many eyes had gazed vacantly on the pendulum of the church of Pisa, before Galileo drew from its regular oscillations, one of the most valuable truths of philosophy—establishing a standard for the measurement of time ! How often had the sight of the passenger been arrested by the kite of the school-boy, until the sagacious mind of Franklin conceived the sublime idea of employing it as a means of bringing down the lightning from heaven ! A habit of constant thought, of continual exercise of the powers of reflection, is the great secret of intellectual exaltation. Neglect it, and your slumbering energies will grow more and more torpid, and you will live and die in the groveling herd, unknown to fame, and useless to society. Cul-

tivate it, and your course will be onward and upward in the path of honor and distinction, and your names will be written in the annals of your profession, and in the history of the world.

It may be well to devote a few minutes to the enquiry, whether the progress and improvement of medical science, to which I have adverted, are appreciated by the public mind. Does the medical profession stand higher now than in times past, when its claims were far inferior? Is it gaining on the confidence and affections of the people, in proportion as it accumulates the means of accomplishing its holy mission?

The answer to these enquiries is in no degree flattering to professional pride. It cannot be denied that the ancient glories of our craft are departed—that its palmy days are numbered with the past. The solemn and magisterial air, and the huge wigs of our illustrious predecessors, though backed by a gold-headed cane and a precious roll of parchment “To all men greeting,” no longer attract the homage of the crowd to the deified Priest of Esculapius. Old things are done away, and all things become new. Unhallowed hands have stripped the ancient idol of all mysterious adornment—all factitious covering, and exposed it to the microscopic eyes of an irreverent and scrutinizing generation.

I repeat it, gentlemen, our profession has declined in public estimation within the present century, whilst it has been advancing in its *claims and merits* beyond all precedent. Mankind appear to have but little more respect for it now than in the days when medical science was but a jumble of superstition and empiricism, and when its practitioners were banished from Rome as public pests. To make such an acknowledgment is disagreeable; but if the contemplation of the picture should lead to an effort to correct the evil and bring about a better state of things, the confession may prove salutary.

Some of the causes of this declension are within the limits of the profession itself. Without attempting to investigate them severally, let me advert to the pernicious habit, exten-

sively prevalent among medical practitioners, of speaking censoriously one of another. Physicians are continually brought in collision. Opportunities occur at every step of our course, to whisper evil against our fellows ; and scandal is always sure to find a willing ear. If the patient or his attendants condemn, as they are prone to do, the treatment of some previous physician, how seldom do we find a practitioner who has sufficient courage and generosity to defend or excuse an absent rival, or to suggest the difficulty of judging correctly of the merits of the case ! Is there not rather a prevailing disposition to censure the practice of others, or at least to acquiesce in the censures bestowed by the patient and his friends ? Where is the physician who has escaped such stabs from the hands of his associates ? How often are those who stand high in the profession, singled out by juvenile and obscure aspirants, as bright and shining marks for the shafts of envy ! And on the other hand, how often do our distinguished physicians and surgeons, as if in the mere spirit of wantonness, though, perhaps, without much thought or motive, pronounce on the practice of their junior brethren, and, it may be, blast with a single word, the prospects of a toiling, struggling beginner !

The truth is, professional reputation has not been sufficiently appreciated by medical practitioners. Each one, it is true, sets a high value on his own reputation, but he does not seem to reflect that his own is but a part of the aggregate ; and that his individual character must rise or fall with that of the profession at large. Every word uttered by one against another, finds believers somewhere. Every word which detracts from individual character, reduces the value of the common stock. In this relation the members of the faculty are a firm in trade. The interests of one are the interests of all. When the partners in the company cast aside their *esprit du corps*, and sacrifice the general good to personal feelings and animosities, the business of the firm is embarrassed, and its profits diminished ; and when the dividend comes to be calculated, there may be a loss to be distributed instead of a gain.

But although the interests of every physician should lead him

to sustain and enhance, rather than detract from the reputation of his fellows, yet I am far from resting the subject on the basis of sordid interest. I would appeal to motives far more lofty—far more noble. To the medical practitioner, professional reputation is of incalculable worth. Many a young man goes forth from our medical schools with no other capital than his education, every prospect in life dependant on the professional reputation which he applies himself to establish. To this tend all the hopes that have cheered him on through years of toilsome study. This is the cloud by day, the pillar of fire by night, that guides his weary footsteps in their pilgrimage to the land of promise. The thought of this was blended with the fervent aspirations of his aged parents, when with full and bursting hearts they craved that Heaven's blessing should rest on their darling son. As time rolls on and new links are thrown around his affections, this becomes the bread of life to her he presses to his bosom—a happy bride; and this the fortune and the fate of those little cherubs who call him father—angels sent from paradise to teach him that the trees of Eden still bear fruit.

Such being the inestimable value of professional reputation, with what religious care are we bound to regard it in a brother! Do we shrink with horror from the thought of piercing his heart with steel? Worse than this we may do, by the utterance of a single word! Gentlemen! while you are yet standing on the threshold of the temple of medicine, let me stamp indelibly on your minds, the resolution to treat with sacred deference the professional reputation of your brethren. Esteem it as inviolable as life itself. Let no temptation—no provocation, induce you to abandon this high and honorable position. If covertly assailed by others, let your magnanimous revenge consist in the return of good for evil. Disarm every antagonist by the use of this christian weapon. And let the voice of condemnation go forth loud and strong against every one who attempts to rise by the ruin of others. Whether high or low, whether professor or subaltern, let such a miscreant be marked as a libel on his profession, worthy of deep and damning in-

famy—an excrescence on the body, of putrid and malignant growth, fit only for the caustic and the knife.

So much for what I consider the chief *internal* cause of the low position of the medical profession. Looking without upon the world at large, we shall discover another cause, equally important, in that dangerous modicum of knowledge possessed by the masses, enough to incite them to universal enquiry, and to embolden them to be judges in everything, but not enough to qualify them for correct judgment.

In the “good old times” when learning was the monopoly of a few, and the modern heresy of universal education had not been conceived, the authority of men of letters was easily maintained. It was sufficient to bear the semblance of wisdom; the counterfeit would pass as currently as the genuine coin. Wigs were of more worth than brains; and a grave and sagacious look, like that of Minerva’s bird, was the best passport to public favor. The medical practitioner of that age had much to gain by a show of mystery. For him, concealment was everything. The treatment of wounds by the application of sulphate of iron to the weapon that had inflicted them, would not have been so eminently successful during centuries of trial, had not the remedy been couched under the significant name of “Sympathetic Powder,” and used in connection with certain mysterious forms and ceremonies.

But a revolution has taken place. The world is not quite so full of fools as it once was; or if it is, the fools are not of the same description. The doors of the Temple of Cos, and of all the other temples and schools of antiquity have been thrown wide open to the multitude. Instead of the Groves of Academus and the Porch of Zeno, we have the Common School—more noble, more mighty, and more commanding in its influence on human destiny, than all the classic institutions of ancient or modern times. From the printing office comes a Franklin—from the corn-field a Rittenhouse—from the anvil a Burritt, to write their names on the world’s history, and to fashion the science and the morals of the age.

But although the sources of knowledge are open to all, and although learning and science are become common property,—although the Philosopher's Stone, and the Elixir of Life, and the Sympathetic Powder, and their kindred follies, are no longer capable of imposing on human credulity, yet mankind are far, very far from being elevated above the reach of imposture. Perhaps they are as easily deceived as ever, but by a different class of follies. There must be some pretension to science—some admixture of truth, to give currency to the schemes of modern adventurers. Empiricism now, instead of resorting to mystery and superstition, seizes hold of a few sound principles in physiology or therapeutics, or more frequently a few striking facts, and proceeds to erect an edifice which dazzles the untutored eye, and attracts the admiring crowd, who have discernment enough to perceive system and symmetry in the structure, but not enough to show them that the pyramid is built on the point instead of the base. The civilized world is overrun with pseudo-medical systems of this description, disguised beneath the forms of science, invading the bounds of the profession, and tending to detract from its character and influence. And although, when time dispels the charm of novelty, and experience falsifies their claims to confidence, they sink into the grave of oblivion, it is only to make room for other systems, which in like manner flaunt their borrowed finery and die.

It were folly to attempt to conceal these truths, or to treat the subject with affected indifference. Let us rather meet it boldly, and seek the remedy. Physicians owe this much both to themselves and to society. It is their duty as well as their interest to sustain the confidence of the public in the profession, and to protect the community as far as possible from experiments on human life.

Am I told that the subject were better left to itself?—to nature?—that all interference would be idle?—that men *will* enjoy their delusions?—that they love to be “humbugged?” I believe no such thing. I have more confidence in the human understanding. I believe that there is a remedy, and that the remedy consists in a more general diffusion of medical know-

ledge. Enlighten the popular mind. Teach the elements of Anatomy, of Physiology, of Hygiene, of Chemistry to the masses. Let the common people learn more of the structure of the human frame—the laws which govern this wonderful microcosm. If this should not serve to fortify the community against the inroads of empiricism, and the fascinations of visionary system-builders, then have I not read human nature in the text book of its divine Author.

In advancing these views, I encounter a violent current of prejudice. What! reveal to the world all our secrets? Throw off from our profession the last shred of mystery? Open the time-honored temple of Esculapius to the vulgar throng? Place ourselves in the power of an impertinent and presumptuous generation, who have no reverence for the dust of antiquity—no veneration for musty books? Prostrate the dignity of our high and honorable calling, by coming down to a level with the common herd, or lifting them upon our platform?

What then shall we do? We cannot go backward. We cannot rob the people of what they know. We cannot resume the veil of concealment and the staff of mystery. We cannot recreate the superstitious awe which enslaved the rabble of Greece and Rome. We cannot restore the glories of Cos, of Gnidos, of Rhodes, and reinstate the Asclepiadæ at their sacred altars.

Neither can we stand still. The spirit of the age forbids. The world moves, and will crowd us along. Besides, our present position is the worst possible. The public mind is in a transition state, groping its way from ignorance to knowledge. It knows just enough of medicine to enable it to do the most injury to our profession. We cannot unlearn it. The only alternative is to give it to drink more deeply of the springs of science.

There is one class of physicians who may well dread a more general diffusion of medical knowledge: namely, those who are themselves deficient. But the accomplished and scientific physician has nothing to lose, but everything to gain from it. In the nature of things he will be more highly appreciated. I appeal to the experience of every well educated medical prac-

titioner, to say in what circle of society he pursues his calling with greatest satisfaction. Is it not among the most intelligent and scientific? Here it is that he is received with the utmost confidence, whilst he is not required to work miracles. Next to these are the most ignorant and superstitious class; to-day servilely and blindly obedient to his prescriptions, to-morrow resorting to some simples suggested by a simple neighbor; to-day his worshipers, to-morrow his defamers, without cause in either case. But it is among those who know a *little* that he finds the thorniest path;—those who do not know enough to perceive their own ignorance—who have not sufficient information to enable them to judge correctly of anything, and just sufficient to induce them to form a judgment about everything—who live neither in the midnight where they can see nothing, nor yet in the daylight where they can see all things; but in the dim and misty twilight, where every object assumes the form with which it is invested by imagination or prejudice.

The circle of individual practice is but an epitome of the world. The primitive era of ignorance and superstition is represented by the untaught and degraded class of to-day. The half-taught and conceited upstarts who know the dangerous little, but not enough to enable them to perceive their own ignorance, are an apt illustration of the present age of transition, which tortures regular medicine with a purgatorial probation. The liberal, enlightened, and reflecting portion of society are a representation of the “better time coming,” when deeper draughts from the “Pierian Spring” shall remove the intoxication of superficial knowledge, and when medical science shall be duly appreciated by a generation of wise and capable judges. I would have every one of you, in confidence and in faith, to labor to bring about that “better time:”

“Knowing this, that never yet
Share of truth was vainly set
In the world’s wide fallow:
Doubting not, sow ye the seed;
After hands from hill and mead
Shall reap the harvest yellow.

Thus, with somewhat of the seer,
 Must the moral pioneer,
 From the future borrow ;
 Clothe the waste with dreams of grain,
 And on the midnight sky of rain
 Paint the golden morrow."

A slight acquaintance with the history of medicine and the delusions which have fastened on it, from the fabulous days of Chiron the Centaur down to the present period, would have a powerful tendency to fortify the public mind against the pretensions of empirics and charlatans. Those of you who have listened to the historical sketches which I gave during the preliminary lectures, may form some estimate on this point. Ignorant man has always been the same credulous animal, the ready dupe of knaves and impostors. No one can peruse the history of the healing art, and study the chapter in human nature which it reveals, without regarding with suspicion and incredulity the claims of all new systems, however bold and confident their advocates, and however plausible the facts on which they rest.

I have lately met with a man who had been repeatedly exposed to the small pox with impunity, and who asserted, for that reason, that the disease was not at all contagious, and that the idea of its contagiousness was utterly fallacious. This individual was a tolerable type of the general class of system-builders. One solitary and striking fact, quite probably an exception to the general rule, is often sufficient for the basis. Thus, Brown, the cotemporary and rival of Cullen, finding himself relieved from a paroxysm of gout by a few glasses of wine, hastily inferred that Gout is always a disease of debility ; and he went on from this as a salient point, to rear his whole system of Sthenic and Asthenic diseases.

It is very easy to obtain facts in support of a new system, or a new medicine. A large proportion of the maladies of our body are cured by the course of nature. No sooner is a diseased action instituted, than a curative effort is also established, competent, in the great majority of cases, if not thwarted by a renewal or continuance of the morbid impression, to throw off the disease and restore the condition of health. Well might the ancient physicians have conceived from these circumstances

their doctrine of an *Archæus* or presiding spirit—a *Vis Medicatrix*, ever on the alert to drive out disease, and restore or preserve the healthy movements.

In other cases, where nature alone is not sufficient for the cure, it may be effected by different or opposite modes of treatment. Ofttimes, any cause producing a strong impression on the body, will effect a cure. An emetic, a cathartic, a sudorific, diverse in their character and *modus operandi*, will frequently accomplish the same result. Hence, physicians may differ widely in their choice of remedies, while their treatment of the disease is equally successful. Differences of this description are habitually seized on by sightless speculators to exhibit the fallacy of medical science.

New remedies and new modes of treatment always have this advantage over the old—that they are employed in the more curable grades of disease. Slight and trifling cases afford an excellent opportunity of trying experiments on health—experiments which have a remarkable degree of interest to many persons. But when disease becomes serious and alarming, the patient, fond as he may be of novelty, flies to the tried and established system for relief, just in time, perhaps, to throw on the regular practitioner the responsibility and odium of a fatal issue.

Besides, the advocates of new systems, being anxious to put their remedies to the test, avail themselves of every deviation from health in which to apply their system; and in this way they can not fail to cure many patients who would have been cured as soon, or sooner, without their interference.

By keeping in view these considerations, we may readily explain the great popularity which has been acquired, in times past and present, by remedial agents or plans of treatment, the most preposterous that credulity, ignorance and superstition could devise. We learn from the early records of surgery, that the prevailing treatment of wounds, was directed to the instrument by which they were inflicted. If a spear, the weapon was carefully wiped and anointed with a salve made of certain ingredients, the process being accompanied with suitable incantations. Meantime the wound was bandaged, and, according to some of the instructions, *let alone for seven days*. We

can readily believe that the plan was, in many cases, completely successful.

In the infancy of the healing art, charms, incantations and amulets were in general use. The cures accomplished under their application were too numerous to admit of doubt. The proof of success was conclusive; and so the world thought for centuries.

There was never a system of medicine proposed that did not profess to be based on facts. Not even the *Doctrine of Signatures* is an exception. This doctrine assumes that the Deity has stamped on every remedial substance, the marks by which its adaptation to particular diseases may be ascertained. The Cassia fistula, having a hollow stem, bears the signature of the intestines, and is therefore adapted to diseases of the bowels. The Euphorbia corollata, indicates by the black spot on the corolla, its fitness for diseases of the eye; and its popular English name, Eye-bright, commemorates the folly. In like manner, Turmeric, and other yellow herbs, were indicated by their color, as remedies for diseases of the bile. The lungs of a fox, a remarkably long-winded animal, were administered as a specific in asthma and other diseases of the chest, attended with shortness of breath. The arm, after venesection, was tied with a bandage of the same color as the blood. A staff, wrapt with a red bandage, was placed at the door as the sign of a bleeder; a sign retained at the present day by barbers, who were also bleeders and surgeons at no very remote period. It is no unusual thing even now to find a red bandage carefully preserved in the family, to be used in bleeding—a relic of the once potent and venerable *Doctrine of Signatures*.

Not less absurd was the reputed science of *Astrology*. The number of metals then known, corresponding with the number of bodies discovered in the solar system, established a remarkable affinity between them, and led to the allotment of a particular metal to each of those luminaries. The sun, being the most brilliant, took charge of gold—the moon of silver, from her fair white surface—the planet mercury, being slippery in its movements, had quicksilver allotted to it, and so of the remainder. We commemorate this ancient superstition by

various names now in use for metallic salts, such as lunar caustic, sal martis, and saccharum saturni.

Not only was astronomy thus perverted from its lofty purpose, but other sciences also. Superstition, seizing on the rudimental science of Chemistry, gave rise to *Alchemy*, the design of which was the transformation of the baser metals into gold. The Philosopher's Stone was the imaginary substance through which this change should be effected. By the same process was to be evolved an Elixir of Life, or a Universal Panacea, to cure all diseases, and prolong life indefinitely.

Among a thousand remedies equally absurd that have been recommended by the highest medical authority, are the powder of human mummy—pulverised toads and serpents—the powdered thigh bone of an executed criminal as a specific in dysentery—a draught from a human skull to cure epilepsy, and the warm blood of a recently slain gladiator, for the same disease. The simple mention of these things is sufficient to exhibit the extreme proneness of the popular mind to credulity in regard to the effects of remedies. There is no doubt however that thousands of well attested cures could have been adduced in favor of all these delectable doses.

It is not necessary to go back to the dark ages of the world in order to exhibit the credulity of mankind on this subject. The history of Mesmerism fully illustrates the same point. Less than a century has elapsed since this curious freak of human fancy ran a triumphant course, and eclipsed the light of medical science. After a brief and brilliant meteoric flight, it suddenly disappeared, as if in death. But in a few years it burst forth afresh, with new principles and new phenomena, and challenged the credence of the world. It is now performing another *currus triumphalis* prior to a second death from which there will be less hope of resurrection. I do not mean to assert that there is no truth in the reputed phenomena of Mesmerism, but simply that the true and false are so intricately blended, that the system, as a system, may be pronounced a popular delusion.

On the explosion of Mesmerism, half a century since, there were many ingenious and acute observers who attempted to

preserve from ruin what they thought was real and useful. An intelligent physician of Connecticut, imagining that he had observed the proofs of the existence of a subtle fluid, to which the potency of certain mesmeric operations was due, conceived the idea that the mineral magnet was capable of putting this fluid in motion. On applying magnetized metallic points to parts of the body affected with disease, the results were so astonishing as to confirm his doctrine, not only in his own belief, but in the estimation of intelligent observers. On the touch of his metallic tractors, pain left the aching limb with electric speed, and the stiffness of rheumatism dissolved in natural pliability. Charmed with the results, he devoted his time to the full development of the remedy. Many well informed medical practitioners came to his aid, and he soon amassed a volume of certificates of cure. Institutions were established in all quarters for the practice of Perkinism. The wonderful discovery was transplanted to England, where it was patronized extensively by the nobility, and where hospitals for charity patients were extensively established. It was computed that at least one million of undoubted cures were performed by the metallic tractors of Perkins in this country and in Europe.

But the charm of novelty began to wear off, and the tractors began to lose their power. Some faithless experimentors prepared wooden tractors, painted in imitation of metal, and performed with them every thing that the genuine magnets could accomplish. The fall of Perkinism was as rapid as its rise. And though it performed an immense number of marvelous cures, it is now heard of only as a departed spirit, whose history is recorded in the chronicles of witchcraft.*

I will not pursue any further this course of remark. The history of Medicine, and of the parasitic systems and fungoid

* The idea of a nervous or vital fluid analogous to electricity, has always been very convenient for the purposes of mesmerisers, Perkinists, "Electrical Psychologists," et id omne genus. This supposed fluid is set in motion by manipulations with the fingers, or by metallic magnets, or by means of the eyes, or with a "galvanic battery" composed of a silver coin set in a plate of zinc and held in the hand. Some very curious phenomena, well worthy of investigation, have lately been exhibited under the name of Electrical Psychology. A number of striking cures of paralysis and rheumatism have been performed which are precisely in character with the cures achieved by Perkinism.

excrescences that have fastened on it, is replete with lessons, which will guard you against error and false reasoning, and qualify you to become able and efficient defenders of your profession. Let me urge upon you the importance of making yourselves familiar with the records of the past, that you may mark the rocks on which others have foundered, and guide your bark in safety to the haven of success and honor.

There is too much expected at the hand of the physician. In the nature of things his science cannot be reduced in practice to mathematical precision. So many fluctuating and indefinite data, so many inferential and even conjectural elements are involved, in a complete analysis of a given case of disease, that anything more than an approximate judgment is often impossible. But there are many who appear to think our science worthless unless it imparts the power of omnipotence. Within a few years past, the small pox has prevailed to a considerable extent in our country. Here and there an individual who had been vaccinated became its victim. A large number of the same class contracted the disease in its modified form, and recovered, without serious indisposition. And yet, because a few vaccinated individuals die of the small pox, and a number of others contract the disease, there are persons who complain of the utter inefficiency of vaccination, and affect to discard it as a vile imposition! So it is with medical practice in general. It is estimated, not according to its benefits, but its imperfections. Though it may restore health to hundreds, yet the solitary case in which it proves inefficient, is trumpeted forth as an evidence of its entire impotency. If a regular practitioner, who has cured nineteen cases, should lose his twentieth patient, he is a murderer. But the empiric or the innovator, in whose hands the nineteen die, and the twentieth escapes alive, is heralded to the world as an angel of mercy, and a miracle of healing power.

The trophies of medical science are easily pointed out. Vaccination alone has saved millions of valuable lives. The improved treatment of other diseases has lengthened the mean duration of human life, in cities and countries where statistics have been preserved—in spite of the counteracting influence

of causes brought into action by the increasing luxuries of civilization. In developing the laws of Hygiene and preventing the ravages of mortal epidemics, medicine has conferred rich blessings on the world. True, the angel of death still comes unbidden to the sick man's chamber, and many times sets at defiance the skill of the physician. But even here, it is something to assuage the pang of agony and soften the dying pillow. Often, in the chamber of death, the kind and sympathizing physician, notwithstanding the impotency of his art, elevates the dignity of the profession, and writes his name in characters that time cannot efface, on the hearts of the bereaved sufferers. But to ensure his patient against the mortal shock, and prolong life uniformly into old age, belongs to Him alone, who can loose the bands of Orion, and pluck the Pleiades from Heaven.

Before concluding, let me direct your attention to the intimate relation that exists among the various departments of science. Time was when they were isolated—when each department was studied with little or no regard to others. But the age we live in has served to link them together inseparably. Every branch of science is but a ramification from one great trunk. Every bud and every leaf of knowledge grows on the one tree. Successfully to pursue a single department, without respect to others, is impossible. The science of medicine is remarkably diffusive in its scope. It subsidizes every other—it embraces the universe in its grasp. He who knows nothing beyond the limits of his profession, cannot be master of his profession.

Comprised by the chair which I occupy, are Physiology, General Pathology, and Medical Jurisprudence. Physiology, in its present form, is almost a new science, so great has been its progress in the last twenty or thirty years. In one direction, it has been drawing rich tribute from Chemistry, organic and inorganic, in another it has gathered copiously from Natural History and Comparative Anatomy, whilst Botany and Vegetable Physiology have also supplied it with invaluable treasures. The field of enquiry in this department is extensive

and diversified, and the student is continually tempted to ramble into the pleasant regions of speculation. There is, however, enough of the true and practical, embraced in the department of Physiology, to engage all the time allotted me in the course of instruction. I shall therefore confine myself mainly to facts and settled principles, rather than attempt to divert you by soaring aloft on the wings of fancy.

Our announcement shows that a distinct Professorship of Comparative Anatomy has been established by the College, from which you will hear at least one lecture a week, without involving you in any additional expense. Comparative Anatomy has become so closely identified with Physiology, that you will permit me to congratulate you on this arrangement, and to encourage you to avail yourselves industriously of its benefits.

Medical Jurisprudence is a subject of great and growing importance. Almost every day, cases are presented in our courts of justice, in which not only property, but reputation and life, may rest on the opinions of medical witnesses. The question of Insanity, in its civil and criminal relations, is one of immense moment. Mental aberration affords a very convenient plea of defense from alleged crime, a plea often reasonable and valid, but at other times a mere cloak for villainy. Though the nature of the subject tends to prevent the establishment and application of fixed principles in relation to insanity, yet we owe it to ourselves and to the world, to render our principles more definite and available than they are at present. The degree of responsibility which the law should attach to a malefactor, may vary with various conditions of mind, ranging from complete insanity, at the lowest point of the scale, to the slightest deviation from the standard of mental perfection. Hereditary defects, not perceptible in the ordinary relations of life, may lead their possessor in chains before the judicial tribunal. Many a man has perpetrated theft or homicide because his parent indulged in the wine-cup, or yielded to the domination of his animal impulses. To establish principles on these subjects, which shall be applicable to judicial proceedings, and to enforce them on the public mind, is an imperious duty,

resting on our profession. It is one of the great achievements embraced by the mission of medical science. Forensic Medicine, in these various relations, will claim an important place in my course of lectures.

Nothing more remains for me, gentlemen, but to take you by the hand, and renew the salutation of welcome. In performing this pleasant duty, permit me to look beyond the formalities of my official position, and to become, not merely your preceptor, but your friend and your brother. In your absence from home and kindred, remember the prayers that are offered up in your behalf, at the family altar; and in morals as well as in education, see that you disappoint not the hopes and aspirations of your dearest friends. At your distant homes, gathered around the cheerful hearth, behold at this moment your kinsfolk—father, mother, brothers, sisters. One seat is vacant—it is yours. They feel your absence—they miss you from the sacred circle—they pronounce your name—they pray for your welfare, your happiness. Across your father's vision come flitting the pictures of temptations that beset the pathway of his son in the populous city. His heart throbs hurriedly, he draws the deep breath, he repels suspicion, he confides in your integrity and virtue. Your mother,—her bosom yearns with deep and holy love, such as only a mother knows, and as she wipes from her eye the silent and welcome tear, oh! with what fervor she begs heaven to protect her beloved son, and preserve him in the path of rectitude, and restore him to the household unblemished! Do not disappoint her! Let the solitudes, and wishes, and hopes, and prayers, which your absence awakens in the sanctuary of home, hover about you as guardian angels, cheering you onward in study, inspiring you with energy and confidence, strengthening you in every virtuous resolution, guiding your footsteps in the path of right, and protecting you from the perils and seductions of the world. And when the labors of the session shall be brought to a close, and you shall return to your homes as messengers of gladness, I also will rejoice, from the depth of my soul, in your virtue, your prosperity, and your happiness.